

VZCZCXRO7908
OO RUEHIK
DE RUEHCH #0958/01 3501358
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 161358Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY CHISINAU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8665
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHISINAU 000958

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB, DRL/AE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: Religious Extremists Desecrate Chanukah
Menorah

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On the afternoon of Sunday December 13, followers of a small, radical Christian Orthodox religious group desecrated the menorah erected by the Jewish community in celebration of Chanukah in Chisinau's central square. After the incident, representatives of the Jewish community transported the pieces of their menorah to the site of the Ghetto Memorial Holocaust monument where they conducted a candle-lighting ceremony. The Government of Moldova quickly condemned the incident. END SUMMARY.

Anti-Semitic Church Group Desecrates Menorah

¶2. (SBU) Moldova's small Jewish community had erected a Menorah in Chisinau's central square to celebrate Chanukah. On Sunday, December 13, about 200 members of the "Sfanta Paraschiva" Orthodox Church and the "Sfanta Maica Matrona" (Holy Nun) NGO held a demonstration next to the Menorah. Several of the group carried a large banner with the slogan "Moldova is an Orthodox Country." Others carried the black, yellow and white flag of the Russian Imperial Monarchists under the Czar. (Note: Ultra-nationalist demonstrators in Moscow recently carried the black-yellow-white Imperialist flag in the "Russky (Russian) March" marking National Unity Day on November 4, a holiday adopted by extreme nationalists, white supremacists, and Russian Orthodox Christian fundamentalists and monarchists. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) As religious hymns and prayers were chanted, an incense censer waved and holy water sprinkled, the leader of the group, priest Anatolie Cibric, delivered a virulently anti-Semitic speech in which he said the public display of the Menorah should not be allowed "in an Orthodox country" and vowed that his group would not allow Moldova "to be defiled by Zhids." He warned his followers that the Jews "would try to kill the Moldovans and hurt our children," and that "the Zhids who want to control the entire world could stumble over Moldova" (i.e. his group would stop them).

¶4. (SBU) Cibric and his followers then dismantled the Menorah and erected a wooden cross on the spot. The group then carried the Menorah down the block to the Stefan cel Mare statue and broke it into pieces, placing them upside-down at the foot of the statue. Some twenty policemen stood by watching the protest and the desecration of the

menorah.

Jewish Community Retrieves Menorah

15. (SBU) Representatives of the Jewish community were later able to retrieve the Menorah, and escorted by 20 policemen took it to be re-erected in front of the Ghetto Memorial Holocaust monument. A group from the Jewish community then re-assembled for the transplanted Chanukah candle-lighting ceremony.

GoM and Press Reactions

16. (SBU) The GoM quickly condemned the Menorah desecration. On December 14, the Prime Minister's office issued a statement, referring to the December 13 incident, saying that "Moldova is a law-governed, democratic state, in which all rights and freedoms have been guaranteed, and where hatred, intolerance, xenophobia and other negative manifestations are impermissible." Minister of Justice Tanase also condemned the incident, saying that if it were proven that the "Sfanta Maica Matrona" organization was engaged in anti-Semitic incidents, it would be dissolved. On December 15, acting President and Parliament Speaker Ghimpu, speaking in the Parliament, called the incident "not typical of our society" and a "provocation," and said that the GOM regretted the incident and guaranteed the rights of all citizens. According to the press, the municipal police currently are investigating the incident.

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17. (SBU) The Communist Party also condemned the event, but accused the Alliance and its leaders of "unleashing anti-Semitism" through their "statements making heroes of Nazi and Fascist leaders and insulting representatives of other nationalities in Moldova," i.e. Russians, Jews, and Roma. On the other hand, in an editorial in the pro-Alliance Timpul newspaper, Tanase's father, Constantine Tanase, suggested that the attack was a provocation by pro-Communist forces aimed at discrediting the Alliance government.

Sfnta Paraschiva and Anatolie Cibric

18. (SBU) The "Sfanta Paraschiva" Orthodox Church, which probably numbers no more than a few hundred adherents, is officially subordinate to the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which answers to the Russian Patriarch in Moscow. Saint Paraschiva is the most popular saint in Romania. Cibric is affiliated both with the "Sfanta Paraschiva" church and the NGO "Sfanta Maica Matrona." His group is fundamentalist Orthodox and has been involved in various previous protests against a range of liberal causes and other confessions.

19. (SBU) On November 4, (the same day as National Unity Day demonstrations in Moscow), Cibric led a group of over a thousand Orthodox believers in front of the Republican Palace and Ministry of Information Development to protest biometrics and any form of electronic identity monitoring, claiming that they were "the Mark of the Beast." On August 15, Cibric's group organized a demonstration against Seventh Day Adventists who had organized a concert (with City Hall

permission) in Chisinau's main square (which includes the Orthodox cathedral). In 2008, Cibric also protested against provisions concerning sexual minorities in the non-discrimination bill (which was not passed in Parliament), and in 2006 he led his supporters in a protest against the distribution of the "Da Vinci Code" in Moldova. The group was also involved in a 2007 egg throwing incident targeting Timpul newspaper headquarters after that newspaper made a quasi-religious reference to the "trinity" of Communist Party leaders.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) The perpetrators of this anti-Semitic incident are a small, xenophobic group whose past targets have included other religious minorities. Their protest was not sanctioned by the Moldovan Orthodox Church writ large, nor did it enjoy any popular support. In fact, the Menorah desecration was the first significant anti-Semitic incident here in a number of years. The government was quick to denounce the incident and religious intolerance, and has assured us that it is investigating the matter.

CHAUDHRY